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SUBJECT: DECEMBER 16 MFA PRESS BRIEFING: SIX-PARTY TALKS, DETENTION
OF ACTIVISTS, PRESS FREEDOM, SINO-FRENCH RELATIONS, SOMALI PIRACY

11. Key points at the December 16 MFA press briefing:

-- China believes the Six-Party Talks is a "process," with the major task being implementing the second phase of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a "comprehensive manner." All six parties "agreed verification was necessary," but the approaches to verification were "very different."

-- Asked about the detention of human rights activist Liu Xiaobo, the MFA spokesman said he was "not aware of the specifics of the case" but that the PRC "opposes any country interfering in China's internal affairs."

--China "supported international cooperation" to "crack down on piracy," but the spokesman did not have any "specific information" on concrete measures China might take.

--China maintains its "solemn position" regarding foreign leaders meeting with the Dalai Lama. "Interference in other countries' affairs" is not a European value, and China "cannot accept" using values as an "excuse" for "undermining" China's interests.

-- The latest regulations on foreign journalists will be "accurately translated into reality," and foreign journalists should contact MFA if they encounter any problems. But foreign journalists should do their work "according to Chinese law."

-- Responding to a question about discrepancies between the actual content of the regular MFA press briefing and the official transcript released afterward, the spokesman said the MFA does not include items that are "are not within its capabilities" so as to prevent "misunderstanding" among readers.

Six-Party Talks

12. MFA Spokesman Liu Jianchao said at the December 16 regular press briefing that each side issued "their own opinions and positions" after the December 2008 Six-Party Talks Heads of Delegation meeting.

China believes the Six-Party Talks is a "process," and that the major task is to implement the second phase of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a "comprehensive manner." Liu said all sides had agreed to provide North Korea with aid equivalent to one million tons of heavy fuel oil, corresponding to North Korea's disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facility. Liu said "all sides agreed verification was necessary," but that the approaches to verification were "very different." China wants the talks to be "sincere, honest and beneficial," and as host of the talks, China is ready to "strengthen communication and cooperation" in the hope of "improving state-to-state relations" and "advancing a peace mechanism" in Northeast Asia.

Detention of Human Rights Activists

13. A journalist asked whether China would release recently detained human rights activist Liu Xiaobo and other activists during its

celebration of the 30th anniversary of opening and reform, to which Liu Jianchao responded he was not aware of the specifics of the human rights cases but that China had made "great success" in achieving a "legal structure" and "handles issues according to the law." Later, when asked for comments on the U.S. State Department's December 11 statement on China's detention of Liu Xiaobo, Liu replied that China "opposes any country interfering in China's internal affairs," even though he was "not aware of the specifics of the case."

Blocked Internet Sites

¶4. During a series of questions about blocked internet sites and press freedom, Liu said he was not aware of the "specific conditions" regarding which internet sites are blocked. China is "following the policy of openness and reform" and manages internet sites "according to the law." Like other countries, there are some internet sites that are "against Chinese law," such as those that treat Taiwan as a separate country, which violate "China's anti-secession law."

Detention of Journalists in Shanxi Province

¶5. Liu answered a question about whether the Central Government would ensure press freedom for foreign journalists visiting Shanxi province following the disappearance and detention of Chinese journalists there by saying that provincial authorities would "welcome" foreign journalists and "facilitate" their work. Liu continued that the "latest regulations" on foreign journalists will be "accurately translated into reality" and foreign journalists

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should contact MFA if they find any problems. Liu said his colleagues would "do their best to help" journalists, but foreign journalists should do their work "according to Chinese law." Liu denied any specific knowledge of the Chinese journalists reportedly detained in Shanxi province, saying that these cases will be "handled within the legal framework."

Integrity of MFA Press Briefing Transcripts

¶6. A reporter commented on discrepancies between the actual content of the regular MFA press briefing and MFA's official transcript released afterward. The journalist asked for Liu's comment and his assurances that the "sensitive questions" asked during the December 16 briefing would appear in the official transcript. Liu said no "sensitive issues" had been discussed. Although the MFA "does its best to speak on behalf of the Chinese Government" occasionally some issues come up that "are not within [MFA's] capabilities" and therefore are "not necessary" to release via the website. This is done to prevent "misunderstanding among readers."

Sino-French Relations

¶7. A journalist cited French President Nicolas Sarkozy's comments that many European leaders had met with the Dalai Lama, the recent problems in Sino-French relations are not Sarkozy's fault and that France will not abandon its values in its relations with China. Liu reiterated China's "solemn position" in this regard, saying that "interference in other countries affairs" is not a European value. China "cannot accept" using "values" as an excuse for activities that "undermine" China's interests, Liu said.

¶8. When asked later about the 45th anniversary of Sino-French relations, Liu said China "would not forget" the 45th anniversary and that China "cherished" its "friendship and achievements" with France. For this reason, China hopes the two countries will celebrate the anniversary in a "happy and harmonious atmosphere." Liu said he believed France did not want the current situation to continue and hopes that France "will do something to solve the problem" so the two countries can come together to celebrate the anniversary.

Somali Piracy

¶9. Replying to a question on Somalia's request for China to send vessels to Somali waters to deal with pirates, Liu said Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei was scheduled to attend a UN meeting on December 16 to discuss the issue. Liu said China "supports international cooperation" to "crack down on piracy" but did not have any "specific information" on what concrete measures China might take.

Chinese Import Fees on Foreign Auto Parts

¶10. Asked about U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Susan Schwab's December 15 comments urging China to stop imposing extra fees on imported auto parts after it lost an appeal at the World Trade Organization, Liu replied that the Ministry of Commerce is "preparing to issue information on that issue shortly" and that journalists should wait for that information.

Iraq Press Conference Incident

¶11. Asked for comment on the journalist who threw his shoes at President Bush during a December 14 press conference in Iraq, Liu said that although people understood issues in different ways, it was important to have "basic respect" for the leaders of another country. Liu joked that he should be careful to watch not only the journalists' hands during the press conference but also their shoes.

Thai Political Situation

¶12. Liu responded to a question about the Thai political situation by saying China "congratulates" Abhisit Vejjajiva on his election as prime minister and hopes China's "friendly neighbor" will "maintain social harmony and economic development."

Vice Premier Li Keqiang Overseas Travel

¶13. Liu announced that Chinese Vice Premier Li Keqiang plans to travel overseas from December 20-30 to visit Indonesia at the invitation of Indonesian Vice President Yusuf Kalla; Egypt at the invitation of Prime Minister Ahmed Mohammed Nazif; and Kuwait at the

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invitation of Prime Minister and Defense Minister Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah. During his visit to Indonesia, Li Keqiang plans to meet with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President Kalla, and attend the third China-Indonesia Energy Forum. Liu said Li plans to further develop friendly relations and build on the "good momentum" the two nations enjoyed in bilateral relations.

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